

THEATER

Suspicious minds

O what a tangled web they weave in A Flea in Her Ear

By Veronica Rueckert

Take two husbands, two wives, a tarty chambermaid and mix with abandon. Add a set with three or more doors and you've got yourself a dizzy little cocktail, equal parts slapstick, sex and mistaken identity. The technical term for such an endeavor is farce, a genre perfected by the French, whose skill with all things naughty is surpassed only by their facility with buttery dough.

The University Theatre's *A Flea in Her Ear* (running at Vilas Hall's Mitchell Theatre) has most of the ingredients for a delectable bedroom farce, though it could use a bit more bubble and squeak. The "flea" in question is the

niggling suspicion troubling Yvonne Deboshe (Betsy Thurman), whose husband Victor's performance in the bedroom goes inexplicably flat. To uncover his suspected infidelity, Yvonne enlists the help of old-school chum Lucille Homenides de Histangua (Sommer Austin), wife to the aggressively Spanish Carlos Homenides de Histangua (John Graham).

The wives hatch a plot to catch Victor in flagrante delicto at the raunchy Pussy a Go Go by way of a perfumed love letter offering a tryst with a secret admirer. Naturally, the course of true lust hits a few bumps in the road. Carlos recognizes Lucille's handwriting on the letter and makes for the Pussy a Go Go vowing mur-

der. Before long everyone else is there as well, including an unsavory Indian tenant, the bodacious chambermaid and Victor's unfortunate nephew, who can't pronounce consonants but still manages to pick up chicks.

Doors slam, beds revolve and people appear in various states of undress, but somehow the show never takes off. It lurches in fits and starts like a used LeCar trying to gain Mount Everest. Moments of genuine hilarity are almost forgotten waiting out the long dull spells.

The University Theatre's *Flea* was translated from French playwright Georges Feydeau's original by Frank Galati, who "freely transported" it from the turn of the century

to 1960s Paris, the process of which is lovingly described in the program notes. But for all the fanfare, too much of the dialogue sounds like a badly dubbed Kung Fu movie.

To *Flea*'s credit, the set is gorgeous, and there are some strong performances. Mitchell Mullen, as Victor, is nuanced and congenial, an assured presence throughout. And John Graham, who recklessly pairs a yellow dress shirt with a lime green scarf, is hilarious as the hot-blooded Spaniard, staying just shy of over-the-top. *A Flea in Her Ear* is remembered as Feydeau's greatest hit, and when he's brandishing his revolver at the Pussy a Go Go, Graham's Carlos reminds you why. ♦